

FACT SHEET

THE IMPORTANCE OF A THOROUGH DENTAL EXAMINATION

-  Periodontal disease relates to inflammation of the gingiva and the supporting structures of the teeth. In its early stages periodontal disease is reversible and only involves the soft tissues surrounding the tooth, as the disease progresses there are bony changes and loss of the periodontal ligament which anchors the tooth to the surrounding bone.
-  Examination of the oral cavity of an animal that is conscious does not allow for a thorough assessment of the state of the oral health of the animal as visualisation and palpation of all the structures is not possible.
-  Anxious and aggressive behaviour can further complicate the conscious assessment.
-  Gingivitis and/or calculus or clinical history suggestive of oral disease (e.g. drooling, pain on opening mouth, refusing to eat certain food types), is indication for further assessment.
-  A thorough oral health assessment involves:
 - general anaesthesia
 - visualisation and palpation of the external features of the head
 - visualisation of the oropharynx, tongue, palate, gingiva and the teeth within the oral cavity
 - periodontal probing of every single tooth in the oral cavity to diagnose any periodontal ligament loss
 - biopsy of any abnormal lesions or masses
 - dental radiographs
-  A record of the examination in the form of a dental chart is an important part of the oral health assessment. The dental chart forms part of the medical record of the patient and allows the veterinarian to assess and plan the oral health care of the pet. It is also a communication tool for clients.
-  Indices including plaque and calculus scores, missing or supernumerary teeth, tooth mobility, bleeding on probing, furcation involvement, gingival recession or hyperplasia should be recorded on the dental chart. None of these investigations can be completed thoroughly in a conscious animal.
-  Veterinarians are the only people qualified to anaesthetise, examine, diagnose and treat oral health conditions.